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S E R M O N

Preached before the Honourable

HOUSE of COMMONS,

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St. *Margaret's, Westminster,*

On *Monday, January 30, 1758;*

Being appointed to be observed as the day of
the Martyrdom of King CHARLES I.

By *J O H N T H O M A S*, D. D.

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A N D

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L O N D O N:

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Martis, 31^o die Januarii, 1758.

Ordered,

THAT the thanks of this House be given to the Reverend Doctor *Thomas*, for the Sermon by him preached yesterday before this House, at Saint *Margaret's, Westminster*, and that he be desired to print the same; and, that Mr. *George Onslow*, Mr. *John Walter*, Mr. *Hardinge*, and Sir *John Barnard*, do acquaint him therewith.

J. DYSON,

Cl. Dom. Com.



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ROMANS xiii. the former part of the 3d verse.

*For Rulers are not a terror to good works, but
to the evil. —*

WE are put in mind, by this day's annual solemnity of the unfortunate contentions, and the fatal calamities, in which this nation was involved in the last century.

And one principal design of it is to excite in us, and the generations after us, an abhorrence, of those detestable proceedings which were the unhappy occasion of them, those that overfet our Monarchy, and brought the people for a long time into bondage and slavery.

And the important considerations contained in the subject I have made choice of for our present contemplation,

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templation, as it comprehends a whole community, and directs the principal operations of the civil magistracy, will be conducive to this design, will furnish us with some useful instructions how we may avoid that rock, on which our forefathers split.

It must be confessed, That the best institutions are liable to corruption, and this holds in nothing more, than in government: For though it appears from this chapter, and many other passages in scripture, that government is of divine designation, and the world cannot well subsist without it; yet it may be made a question, whether certain species of government, under that extreme degree of depravation, which has actually prevailed in many civil communities, can, in any degree, answer the original end of that institution, and therefore be a real blessing to the subjects of it: And particularly those species of government, in which the lives and fortunes of subjects are at the disposal of the arbitrary will of the Prince.

Surely, it is but a light thing that Men be protected from such violence and wrong, as may be offered by private persons, whilst their very blood and treasure are not only in continual danger of being wantonly sacrificed, but have, in fact, been many times sacrificed with the greatest profusion, to gratify the ambition, or to enlarge the Empire of a weak or cruel Monarch.

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And what destruction such a malignant spirit, abetted by arbitrary rule, can work upon the earth, not only the many intestine distresses and oppressions of a neighbouring state, but the troubles of Europe for the present and the last centuries, can abundantly testify.

Who can be so credulous as to imagine the people were made for one Man : Or that God intended an absolute and implicit obedience should be paid to the dictates of his will alone, should they be ever so capricious or cruel ?

Common sense, I am persuaded, reclaims against such a supposition ; and I doubt not to shew, That no other is the voice of revelation. Both agree, That the end of government is the interest of the people. It was for this, that Men first combined and united ; and the preservation of life, liberty, and property, were the things they had an eye to, They submitted to be governed for their own sakes, That their persons and substance might be defended from all encroachments, and not be devoured by others of what rank or condition soever. And historians and politicians are of the same opinion. For where Monarchies were freely erected, they always suppose, and they generally relate, that the people advanced to that dignity the Man, who was most likely to rule them with equity and pru-

dence ; One, who not for his ambition, but for his approved moderation, was raised to Kingship.

The power of a King is likened to that of a Father ; and as long as he continues to maintain so estimable a character, Kingly Government bears some resemblance to that of Heaven, for fathers after the flesh, as well as our heavenly Father, are presumed to have always their children's interest and welfare at heart.

Conformably hereto, is the duty of a King represented in the 5th book of Moses, where he is forbidden to multiply his own pleasures, - and is enjoined *to write a copy of the law, and to read therein all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of the law ; and that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren.*

I conceive from this passage, that a King is charged not to oppress his people, nor to burden them needlessly to gratify his own humours, but to study the laws of his country, and to fear God.

Under the gospel indeed, obedience to magistrates is more strongly enforced and inculcated ; christians are commanded to be *subject to principalities and powers, to be subject to every ordinance of Man, whether it be to the King as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them, who are sent*

sent by him; but the same author, who has enjoined us this obedience, supposes magistrates to be what they ought to be, A terror, as my text expresses it, not to good works, but to the evil; or, as it is said in the verse following, he is the minister of God to thee for good, a revenger to execute wrath on those that do evil.

Hence then it does in some measure appear, that the duties between King and People are reciprocal, that they are relative to each other. But I shall pursue this argument a little further, and then consider, whether upon the principle of a right of self-preservation in the civil community, asserted under just restrictions and limitations, that dark deed of our ancestors, the murder of the King, can be defended; whence other considerations will arise at this time deserving of our notice and attention.

And first to pursue my argument in favor of such a right.

God hath given to governors a right to the obedience of their subjects; on the other hand, he has given to the people a claim to their care, justice and protection. And if governors so far forget the charge with which they are intrusted by God and the community; if they so far pervert their power, as to make it an instrument not of protection, but of oppression; and instead of cultivating

cultivating a fatherly affection for their people, betray a kind of hostile disposition towards them, by invading their most valuable rights, and counteracting the most essential principles of the constitution, (the foundation of national security and tranquility) : Then subjects, by parity of reason, seem to be released on their part, to be in equal degree discharged from their allegiance, and are no longer obliged to consider them as the ordinance of man, as the ordinance of themselves ; much less to consider them as vested with the high character which yet is the just character of all good princes, the character of the ministers of God.

If this be not the case, in vain are the coronation oaths administered to them ; and in vain also are laws made and established for the direction and restraint of power. Upon this state of the case, it is absurd not to suppose subjects at liberty to provide for themselves, when a Prince shall, contrary to all law and humanity, make havock of their substance, or deprive them of their religious and civil rights. And upon this foundation our happy establishment appears to rest at present ; and we are under a sort of necessity of conceiving it to be lawful or usurped, in proportion as we admit or reject this doctrine of the lawfulness of a right of self-preservation in extreme cases, that is, where all other gentler means shall prove abortive and ineffectual

ineffectual to redress the real and insupportable grievances of the subjects.

When a late Prince set himself up above, or despised the law; when he claimed a power of dispensing with it in numerous instances of sovereign importance and nearest concern to our wisely limited constitution of government, and had made large strides towards introducing again the papal yoke, which *our fathers were not able to bear*, the *people*, alarmed at the attempt, stood up for their violated liberties and rights, and invited to their aid a Prince with an armed force to deliver them out of their distress. And all ranks and degrees of men combined and associated to assist him; and thus they accomplished their design justifiable by the laws both of God and Man.

The deserted King, conscious of his great abuse of power, and dreading the justice of an incensed people, fled, and took refuge in a strange country, a country, naturally at enmity with the protestant nation of free born Britons, insatiably ambitious to extend its Empire by trampling upon the rights and liberties of mankind, and nursed up in the principles of a superstition, which does not scruple to propagate itself by the most cruel persecutions and palpable violations of the laws of nations. And when afterwards he made various attempts forcibly to recover his abdicated dominions, he was as
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often opposed and repelled by force; and to this national vigour, exerted in a crisis of very great extremity, and in necessary vindication of the civil and religious constitution, we owe all those singular advantages which we enjoy under the present settlement; and its validity depends upon it.

But, perhaps, some man will say, that the command given under the gospel to submit to the powers in Being is without reserve; that St. Peter bids Men submit for the Lord's sake, and St. Paul for conscience sake; and this same Apostle orders Titus to put the Cretans in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, and commands every soul to be subject to the Higher Powers, even to a persecuting Nero.

Here, I shall not need to alledge, that the primitive christians were traduced and unkindly represented by their adversaries, as enemies to government, and as men that were turning the world upside down; that all states are alarmed and take offence at a new and growing sect. And therefore, that the Apostles, under these circumstances, might be supposed on this account to inculcate more frequently, and to press more earnestly, the necessary duties of obedience to the powers that were, to take away all occasion from such as were disposed to accuse them of being despisers of all temporal principalities, or civil authority, or at least of their being

ing no friends to Cæsar. This, I say, I shall not need to alledge. The Circumstances of the Apostles were indeed extraordinary, and gave very just, and very frequent occasions to assert the duties of subjects to the civil magistrate, to remove the prejudices of their own Jewish converts, most averse to subjection to the Roman power, and to remove from themselves the malicious imputation of their adversaries. But the duties of subjects they lay down like other moral duties, obvious to the reason and natural understandings of men. They lay them down in their generality, and leave them to be interpreted and restrained by the nature of government, the necessities of mankind, and the intellectual faculties of man, implanted in him by nature, improved and civilized by experience and society, and perfected by the revelation of the doctrine of the gospel. The gospel confirms what was otherwise known to be honest in private life, and to be just in a state of civil society; and, it moreover adds to them the sanctions of infinite value; but neither our Saviour Christ, nor his holy Apostles, appear in matters temporal, to have ever set up for rulers and judges, or in any one instance, to have taken upon them to model the kingdoms of the world, or to treat of politics. The gospel left these matters as they were before, and all men as it found them with respect to their civil rights, which are best defined by recurring to the nature and end of the institution of civil government: And, to what has been

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said upon this head, a great confirmation arises from history, and an observation of the practice of mankind. History will furnish us with examples; I shall content myself with reciting two, one from sacred, the other from civil history. The former is recorded in the twelfth chapter of the first book of Kings, where it is said, when the people applied to Rehoboham to alleviate their heavy yoke and grievous service of his father, upon his answering roughly, and threatening to chastise them with Scorpions, and to aggravate and load their yoke, they broke his yoke from off their neck, and made a final revolt.

The other, we learn from the Roman people, who expelled Tarquin, because of his tyrannical oppression, and even abolished Kingly Government.

But after all, and notwithstanding some exceptions may be made to it, yet it certainly was of standing, and of the last importance to mankind, for the Apostles to preach up civil obedience in general, for subjects ought to bear a great deal ere they withdraw it from their lawful governors. The overthrow of an establishment is the last resort and a most dangerous experiment; Tacitus, perhaps, may be supposed, in conformity to the government under which he lived, to say, it is better to live under a bad Prince than none at all. The observation, however, is certainly true in the ordinary course

course of government, though it will not hold good in certain cases of national extremity, of which we have been speaking. And whether from our reason and our dreadful experience, we estimate the malignity, or from the precepts and sanctions of the gospel, we measure the sin of rebellion, it is undoubtedly a crime of most frightful dimensions, and big with the most horrid consequences, including the guilt and miseries of the commission of every thing villanous, and the destruction of every thing dear to us.

And, if all sins are greater or less, in proportion as they affect society, this, beyond compare, is the most monstrous, as it strikes at the very root, and saps the foundation of it.

And these were the genuine offspring, and fatal effects of that rebellion we are here met to lament and detest.

Let us see then, whether the advocates for it, (for some such there may be) can defend the actors and abettors of it, upon the principle of self-preservation, which we have hitherto insisted on.

The mockeries and insults of the people, the sham trial, and at last the murder of the King, I am persuaded must appear horrid to the eye of humanity itself. Of the tragical event, therefore, I mean not to

infirm. And as to the first beginnings and fatal progress of our miseries, many may approve, and very justly approve of the constitutional opposition given by the friends of liberty, to put a stop to the encroachments, which the King was making on the liberties and properties of his subjects; for that there were just causes of complaint, that the people were oppressed with unwarrantable impositions, that unjustifiable demands were made upon them in the beginning of that reign, all writers upon the subject seem to admit, and whoever reads the incomparable history of that rebellion, with the noble author's useful remarks upon the steps and passages of it, must observe, that those, who first engaged in it, had no ill designs, nor did they suspect such would be the consequence as did afterwards happen, but they only wanted to have those grievances redressed which they then complained of.

And now the question is, whether the concessions made by the King were adequate to the public security, and the reasonable desires of the people, if they were, the greatest patriots for liberty must condemn the machinations of those men, that first with an insatiable perseverance in making extravagant demands, divested him of every branch of his regal dignity, and afterwards brought his person to the block.

It must be needless, before this audience, to recite minutely every instance of the King's earnest desire to gratify

gratify his subjects in every thing, that subjects could ask, or a sovereign yield to : I shall, therefore, content myself with mentioning this single circumstance, that when he had not only redressed all the grievances complained of, but provided against them for the future, by a series of laws, the most beneficial to the subjects interest, as well as favorable to their security and liberty ; when he had not only given his royal word to his parliament, that all just cause of apprehension and suspicion should be removed, but as a pledge of his integrity to fulfil the same, invested them with a power coextensive with his own ; surely, at this period, the opposition of the pretended advocates for the liberty and rights of their fellow subjects, wears the distinguishable character of rebellion against the constitution, and of a traiterous confederacy against the authority of their sovereign, on the one hand, and the rights and liberties of their fellow subjects on the other ; and is justly chargeable with the anarchy and confusion, the perplexity and distress, to which, this, then flourishing nation, was, in a short time reduced ; when the burdens laid upon them by the King appeared imaginary, if compared to what followed, and his were fatherly chastisements in respect to those cruelties, they were, under the republic, obliged to submit to.

New schemes and models of government, were daily fashioned, some of which were crushed in their birth,
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and others expired soon after, and none proved satisfactory to the people, till the Divine Providence restored to us our ancient laws, and established our constitution in church and state, upon its former plan.

Be this then a caution to us and our posterity, how we engage in measures, either of popular vogue, or such as are set on foot by artful and designing men, for those who make the loudest noise for liberty, have generally meant nothing more by it, than to further their own secular interest, and the well meaning multitude become no better than the tools of a party, and the instruments by which their leaders are advanced and promoted.

But to return, and to consider, how much more aggravating their case must be, who withdraw their obedience from a magistrate who is *not a terror to good works, but to the evil*; from one who makes the good of his people the rule of his actions; for if the fruits of discord and rebellion are so sour and disgusting, where the people shall have some foundation for their murmurings and complaints, in such a condition as ours is, surely, discord and rebellion must be looked upon as no less than fighting against God, and resisting his minister and ordinance, for whenever magistrates moderate their Power as they ought, and by their good government make the condition of their people, such as the end of their
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institution, and the sacred endearing characters of a minister of God, and a father of the people require, then to resist them, is to resist God's injunctions and instruments; and that God is the protector, patron and advancer of good Princes, scripture abundantly witnesses; the most high beareth rule over the kingdoms of men, and appointeth over it whomsoever he pleases, or he kindleth a light in their minds to discern their own interest, in that they could not be happy without a ruler. *By me Kings reign, and Princes decree justice*; it is God, saith Daniel, that setteth up Kings, and that power is given them from God; and accordingly, says our Saviour, *thou couldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above*. Men are forbid to curse, or speak evil of the rulers of the people, and amongst the reserved to the day of judgment for punishment, are, according to St. Peter, such as despise dominion and government, and are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

To apply this to our own case, and to make some small estimate of the blessings we enjoy under the present Royal Family.

It is a maxim in our law, that Kings can do no ill, and happy is it for us, that so excellent is our constitution, so admirably framed and modelled for the mutual benefit of Prince and People, that it is not in the power
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of the Monarch of Great Britain to do much evil, were he so disposed, since no law can be enacted, without the concurrence of the three estates ; but it is our peculiar felicity, that it appears more out of the will, than the power of his majesty to be any other than the nursing father of his people.

He has not so much as given us cause to suspect, that he would be pleased, to have his will and pleasure, loose from restraint, but seems well satisfied with so much power as the law gives him, and might challenge the most disaffected to shew an instance of his straining his prerogative, of any invasion of the religious and civil rights of his subjects, or of any attempt to innovate on the constitution ; and, if any law has been ever enacted, whereby the minds of the people have been disturbed, the King and his house are guiltless.

Extraordinary proceedings at law are never given into, nor has any man fallen by them, that can say he suffered wrongfully.

Justice is well and impartially administered, even, where the King is party. How much the good of his people is uppermost in his mind, appears, in that all his speeches from the throne, I might indeed say, all the actions of his life, breath paternal affection, promise a sacred regard to our security, and the public tranquility,

tranquility, recommend unanimity among ourselves, and promote, as much as possible, the ease and welfare of his subjects in an universal and uninterrupted enjoyment of their rights, both religious and civil.

In his private character, he is remarkable for his tenderness and compassion, even, where the lives of irreligious, traitorous miscreants are concerned, I had almost said to a fault. And in that part of justice, which consists in discharging his private contracts, or those payments, which issue out from the civil list, he has hitherto out-done all that have gone before him, a prevailing motive, this, to endear him to his commercial subjects.

As to faith, sincerity, and openness of behaviour, and the corresponding virtues of the mind, magnanimity, fortitude, and generosity, he is both disposed and enabled by them to be a most effectual benefactor to, and protector of his people.

And, now, whilst we are bewailing the calamities of our forefathers, and the guilt they were involved in, whilst we are recollecting the severities that were exercised upon a Monarch, to whom every historian ascribes great personal virtues, though, with several failures in the civil administration,

Let us not be unmindful of the happiness we all enjoy under his present Majesty, and whatever defects of loyalty

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we may discover in the subjects of the former, let us supply by dutiful returns of gratitude to the latter. And as he feeds us with a faithful and true heart, and rules us prudently with all his power, let us retain in our minds such affections and veneration for his person and government, as are due to every one, who *beareth not the sword in vain, and, who is a terror, not to good works, but to the evil*; especially, let us direct our devout thankfulness and prayers to him, by whom Kings rule, for having made him so great and so lasting an instrument of the civil and religious welfare of his people, and for the long continuance of our happiness under his equitable and auspicious reign; and let us so lead our lives in all godliness and honesty, that providence may be pleased to perpetuate to us and our posterity the inestimable blessings of our free constitution and pure religion under a Protestant Prince of his Royal House.



F I N I S.
